▼ ▼ ▼ CHAPTER 7

Reconstruction

For a brief period following the Civil War, African-Americans exercised their political rights as American citizens. This period, from 1868 until 1877, is called Reconstruction. Because African-Americans were a majority in the state and because they were politically organized through the Republican Party, they controlled state government. In 1877, the Republicans lost political power. After that state government no longer protected African-Americans. State officials began to take away more and more rights. This period of slow loss came to a climax in 1895. Led by Governor Ben Tillman, whites rewrote the state constitution. The major purpose of that rewriting was to make sure that African-Americans would never again have political power.

Reconstruction and what came after were remarkable periods in the state's history, filled with historical controversy. Some people distorted what happened to serve their own purposes. The major distortion was that African-Americans ruled very badly. Believing that distortion allowed whites to justify taking blacks' rights away. Even if misrule did take place, white actions were illogical. To say that some corruption among African-American political leaders justified taking away political rights from all African-Americans makes as much sense as eliminating all men from politics because a few men take political bribes.

This chapter is the story of what happened. It centers on three major themes. First, African-American political leaders made many contributions. Much came out of Reconstruction that is still with us today. Second, they lost political power for several reasons. White prejudice and mistakes by Republican leaders were both important. Third, even though they lost power and rights, they built a foundation for later change. The economic, educational, and social institutions African-American political leaders created would some day support a new civil rights movement.

The 1868 Constitution

Although it was widely condemned by white political leaders, the 1868 Constitution was probably the best constitution ever written in South Carolina. A majority of the men who wrote it were African-Americans. Many of the ideas in it were so good that when Governor Ben Tillman rewrote it in 1895, his white supporters demanded that some of the things added in 1868 be left in.

Following the Civil War, whites in South Carolina attempted to return the state to the Union without giving African-Americans any political rights. They ratified the 13th Amendment that ended enslavement. But they refused to budge an inch in granting any political rights beyond ending legal enslavement. Instead, whites wrote a new constitution that denied the right to vote to all except white males. When the white dominated legislature met, it passed laws, called "Black Codes," that greatly restricted rights. Non-whites could not travel freely. They had to pay a $1,000 bond just to leave the state. Non-whites were forced to work from sunrise to sunset, except Sundays. They could not have visitors or leave their place of work without permission. They had to obtain a special license to have a business. They even had to use the term "master" when speaking to their employers. In other words, whites tried to recreate enslavement all over again in a different form.

This clearly was not what the Civil War was all about. Having won the war, the Union expected the South to end enslavement, not recreate it. Congress took action. It passed the 14th Amendment, which granted all citizens equal rights and equal protection under state law. When South Carolina's white gov-

Immediately after the Civil War, the white South tried to reinstitute a modified form of enslavement by legal contracts and codes that regulated the behavior of freedmen. Here a plantation owner reads a contract that will bind those he formerly enslaved to work for him for a year. Reproduced from Constance B. Schulz, Ed., The History of S.C. Slide Collection, *slide B-113 (Sandlapper Publishing Company, 1989). Courtesy of S.C. Historical Society.*

ernment refused to ratify the amendment, Congress demanded that it be accepted. Congress abolished these unfair new governments, returned the state to military rule, and forced South Carolina, along with other southern states, to write new constitutions. This time African-Americans played a central role.

In early 1868, a new convention met for that purpose. Its members included forty-eight whites and seventy-six blacks. The ideas they placed in the new document were very progressive.

The authors of the new constitution extended the right to vote to every male over twenty-one who was a resident of the state. In addition, the new constitution allowed the people to elect a number of state officeholders. Under the 1865 Constitution, offices like the Secretary of State and the Attorney General were not elected. Rather, they were chosen by the legislature. For the first time, the number of members each county would have in the House of Representatives was based on population alone. Wealth would not be a factor. This meant that rich coastal areas like Charleston would no longer have an unfair advantage over other counties that had more people but less money. It included a complete bill of rights for the first time. Speech, assembly, and other rights we take for granted today were protected. The government could no longer jail people for debt. The Constitution protected the property of married women by preventing its sale to pay their husbands' debts. It protected some of everyone's property. The courts could not take the first $1,000 in property and $500 in personal possessions to repay debts. Poor people of all races especially benefited from these measures.

The 1868 Constitution went beyond political and property rights. It gave government the job of improving life for all citizens. To do this, it directed the state

to create and maintain a free public school system. All races and all classes were to have equal access to all public schools and colleges. It allowed the state to borrow money for public projects, like roads, canals, and bridges.

Many of these ideas can still be found in the state's constitution today. Rights, protections, and obligations of state government are central principles of good government. We owe Reconstruction leaders, including African-Americans, a great debt.

Leaders

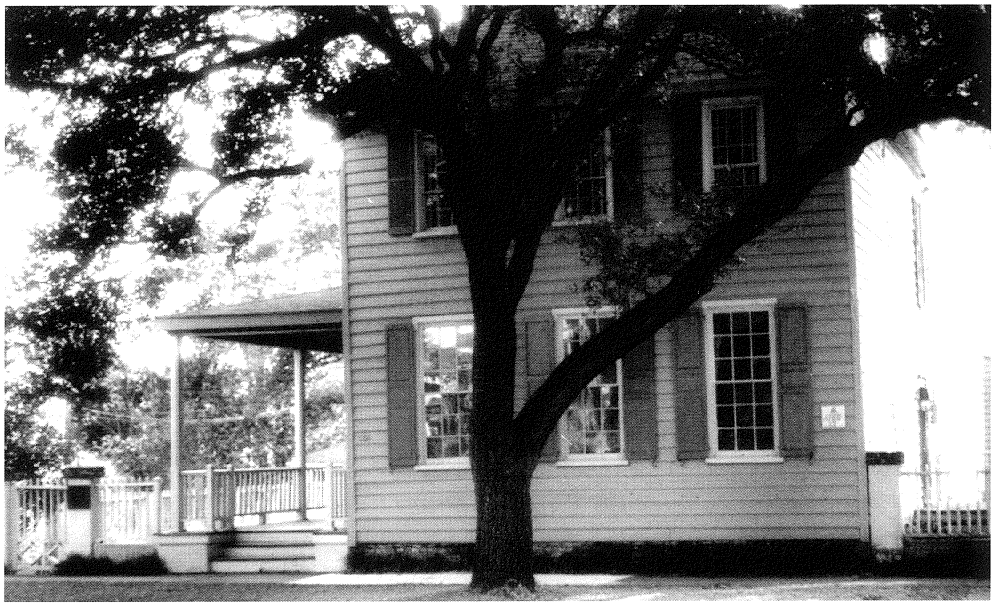
Who were the leaders who helped create this new constitution? Who were the leaders who would govern the state under it? Over 250 African-Americans held state or local office during Reconstruction. They were Northerners who came to South Carolina as Union soldiers during the Civil War and remained in South Carolina after the war. They were teachers sent south by the American Missionary Association. Some were sent by the African Methodist Episcopal Church and other denominations to revive old congregations or build new ones. Some were agents sent by the Freedman's Bureau to help the freedmen. A few were born free in South Carolina but left the state before or during the war and returned after the war. Many were enslaved before the war and became leaders after being freed. These new leaders held a wide range of state offices. Alonzo J. Ransier in 1870 and Richard H. Gleaves in 1872 held the of office of Lt. Governor, Jasper J. Wright held a seat on the Supreme Court. Francis Cardozo and Henry Hayne held the office of Secretary of State. Eight different African-Americans served as members of the United States Congress from 1868 until 1867.

African-Americans were a majority in the S.C. House for the entire period from 1868 to 1877. Just under half of the members of the S.C. Senate were African-Americans (for most of the same period). Whites mocked them and charged that they were ignorant and unfit to govern. The facts do not support this charge. They were much better educated than most whites in the state. Nine in ten were literate and one in ten had a college education.

We should note that many whites held office in this period. Even though a majority of the voters were black, they were willing to elect whites to office. Blacks chose to elect white governors to head the state, though they did elect two African-Americans as Lieutenant Governor. White voters were not nearly as opened-minded.

Joseph Rainey

Let us look at some of the unique individuals who held these positions. Joseph Rainey was the first African-American to ever hold a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. He was born in Georgetown in 1832. After his father was able to buy freedom for the fam-



Jospeh Rainey House. This house, still standing in Georgetown, is where Joseph Rainey, S.C.'s first African-American member of Congress, was born in 1832 and where he died in 1887. Rainey served in Congress longer than any other African-American from the state. Photo by Aimee Smith.

ily, they moved to Charleston, where his father became a successful barber. After getting as much education as possible, Joseph, too, became a barber. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Confederate Army forced him to work building defenses for the city. He and his wife escaped to Bermuda, where he once again became a successful barber. While working he did all that he could to increase his education. He asked customers for books to read and had them help him with reading and writing exercises. After the war he returned to South Carolina and helped write the new constitution. Republicans were so impressed with his work that they elected him to the state Senate. When a vacancy occurred in the U.S. House, he was nominated and elected. Listening quietly helped him learn about how Congress worked. He also helped a number of ex-Confederates regain their political rights. In 1871, he made his first big speech, supporting a law that would stop the Ku Klux Klan and other groups from attacking people. He continued in the House until the election of 1878, when he was defeated. No other African-American served longer in Congress than Rainey. In 1993, the residents of Georgetown named a park in his honor.

Robert Smalls

You have already learned about Robert Smalls as a Civil War hero. He was born into enslavement in Beaufort in 1839. After being moved to Charleston, he was hired out. He worked at a variety of jobs around the docks, and eventually learned sailmaking. He married Hannah Jones, a beautiful hotel maid. After their child was born, he bought his family's freedom for $800. When the war started, the Confederates forced him to work on a supply ship as its pilot. While working on the supply ship, he performed his daring exploit of stealing the ship and taking it to the Union forces. He went to Washington and helped convince Lincoln and his advisors that African-Americans should be allowed to join the fight. After the war, he helped write the new constitution and was elected to Congress. He took office just a few months after Rainey and served until defeated in 1878.

Smalls did get back into Congress, however. So many African-Americans lived in the eastern part of the state that the white Democrats could not always win elections there, even through the use of guns and fraud. Democrats redrew congressional district lines so that most of the African-American voters would be in a single district. This meant that, at best, African-Americans could elect only one member of Congress from the state. In 1884, Smalls won that seat. While in Congress, Smalls showed that he cared about all the people in his district. He did not care if they were white or black. He tried to keep the taxes low. He tried to help those who had lost property during the war. In 1886, a white Democrat defeated him. He had evidence that fraud cost him the election, but officials rejected his appeal. His last days in politics were at the 1895 convention. There he argued eloquently for equal voting rights for African-Americans. It was to no avail. The convention ignored him and the other four African-American delegates. Smalls spent his last years in a federally-appointed position as customs collector in Charleston.

Small's final act was typical of his life of daring adventure. In 1911, he heard that a white lynch mob was about to kill two African-Americans jailed in Beaufort. He sent people to key points in the city and spread a rumor that the city would be burned if the men were harmed. The ploy worked. The white sheriff posted extra guards and turned away the mob. In 1913, he died in his sleep in the same home where he and his mother had lived when they were enslaved.

Robert Brown Elliott

There is some historical doubt about the background of Robert Brown Elliott. He claimed Boston as his birthplace. He also claimed that he was a sailor in the U.S. Navy during the Civil War. However, some evidence exists that he may have been a British subject who decided to stay in the United States. He may never have been a U.S. Citizen. All this is uncertain. What is certain are his abilities. Many people considered him an intellectual giant. He was a powerful speaker, having served in the S.C. House and as head of the Republican Party. He served several terms in the U.S. Congress. While in Congress, he won praise from national newspapers for his eloquent speeches. He resigned twice from the U.S. House. The first time was in a unsuccessful attempt to win a seat in the U.S. Senate. The second was when he came home to try to reunite that state's Republican Party, which was falling into disarray. He was forced

out of politics after thinking he had been elected attorney general in 1876. He probably did have the most votes. Once whites took over state government, no one with power would back his claims. His last political actions were as a lawyer. He successfully defended a number of fellow Republicans who were taken to trial by the new Democrat-controlled state government. In his final years of life, he worked as a lawyer in New Orleans.

Richard H. Cain

Richard Cain was Southern by birth, but he spent most of his life before the Civil War in the North. He became a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and served as a minister in Brooklyn, New York during the war. After the war, his church sent him to South Carolina where he entered politics. He spent a great deal of energy helping farmers obtain land. He helped write the 1868 Constitution. That same year, Charleston voters elected him to the S.C. Senate. All the while he edited and published the *Missionary Record,* a weekly newspaper that supported Republican causes. In the U.S. Congress, he strongly supported laws that would protect the civil rights of African-American citizens. He denounced calls for African-Americans to return to Africa. He said whites should be ashamed to have used his people's forced labor to build wealth but then want them to go away after freedom came. Even after the Democrats took over the state government in 1877, he managed to retain his seat in Congress. Then he changed his mind. He felt that too much had been lost. He sponsored a bill to pay boat passage for African-Americans back to Africa. With great foresight, he spoke out for women's right to vote forty years before women finally won that right. The Republicans failed to renominate him in 1878. He spent his final years as an AME Bishop out of the state.

Robert C. DeLarge

Robert C. DeLarge, born in 1842 in Aiken, S.C., was enslaved at birth. As a young man he attended Wood High School. Upon completion of his education, he became an agent in the Freedmen's Bureau. He helped organize the Republican Party in South Carolina. He became chairman of the platform committee of the state Republican convention in May of 1867. DeLarge signed the Republican platform that called for tax reform, court reorganization, and popular election for all offices. The Republican platform included welfare assistance, liberal immigration laws, and funds for railroads and canals. A new land policy designed to break down the large land monopolies and to foster the divisions and sale of unoccupied land was also a part of the platform. Under the new state constitution, courts were restructured, and a new tax system was designed. Funds were authorized to rebuild the railroads and canals and finance the sale of some small plots of land to small framers. After the constitutional convention, DeLarge moved from one important position to another. He went from the South Carolina House of Representatives to the office of Land Commissioner and then to the U.S. Congress. He won the election to Congress by less than a thousand votes. The election was contested by his opponent Christopher Bowen, an independent Republican. DeLarge participated in the first session of Congress but did not function as a member of Congress during the second session because he was occupied with defending the right to keep his congressional seat. During the lame duck third session, Congress and the election committee took up Bowen's challenge to DeLarge. There were charges and countercharges from both individuals. Bowen was accused of bribing DeLarge's lawyer to withhold vital evidence. Bowen could have been disqualified for having already been sworn in as a South Carolina legislator and as the sheriff of Charleston. There was also a charge of bigamy against him. DeLarge was accused of having illegal election managers, improperly tallied polls, and of stuffing ballot boxes. The election committee said that fraud and election irregularities had occurred on both sides. It was impossible to determine who had been elected, and the committee asked that the House declare the seat vacant for the rest of the term. DeLarge was unseated by a voice vote of the House and his seat was left vacant. After DeLarge left the Congress, he was named magistrate in Charleston. He occupied that post until his death of consumption in 1874, at the age of thirty-one.

Alonzo J. Raniser

Alonzo Raniser from Charleston was free before the war. He was self-educated and had worked as a ship-

ping clerk. He was a rather modest and straight forward person, but was extremely effective as a parliamentarian in the meeting to select representatives from Charleston to the 1868 constitutional convention. He was a reliable member of the Republican party, serving as chairman of the state Republican Executive Committee. In 1870, he was elected and served as Lt. Governor. He succeeded DeLarge as Congressmen from South Carolina's Second District.

Richard H. Gleaves

Richard H. Gleaves was a Northerner from Pennsylvania. He moved to Beaufort after the Civil War to enter business with Robert Smalls. In the State Republican Convention of 1867, Gleaves was elected convention president. He later served as trial justice, commissioner of elections, and probate judge. From 1872 to 1877, he was Lieutenant Governor. He resigned as Lieutenant Governor when Wade Hampton became Governor in the disputed election of 1876. In 1880, he was appointed a U.S. Customs Inspector at the port of Charleston.

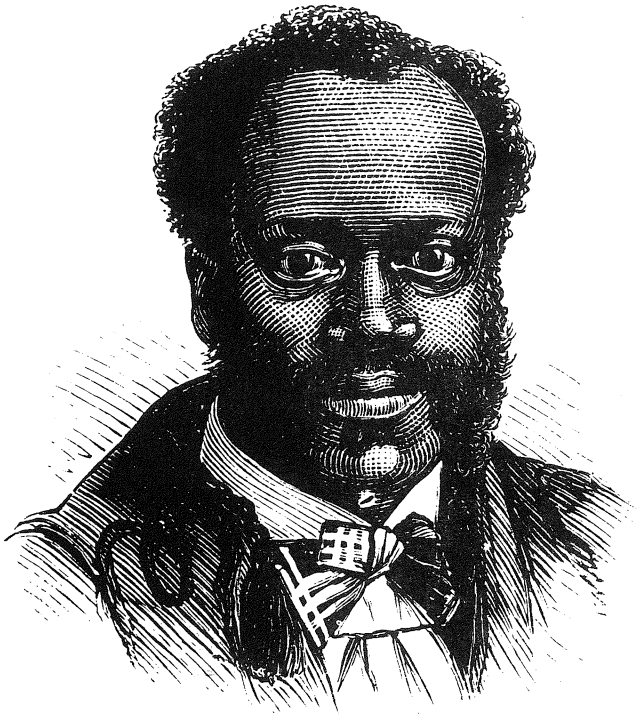
Justice Jonathan Jasper Wright

Justice Jonathan Jasper Wright was elected to the South Carolina Senate in 1868 and as an Associate Justice to the State Supreme Court in 1870. Wright was born in Pennsylvania to a family of farmers. After attending Lancasterian University in Ithaca, New York, he began teaching school. As was the custom of the day for aspiring lawyers, he read law in a lawyer's office. After completing his law studies, Justice Wright was not permitted to stand for the Pennsylvania bar. He joined the American Missionary Association and moved to Beaufort to teach the freedmen. While in Beaufort, he taught and dispensed legal advice. Justice Wright was permitted to stand for the Pennsylvania bar and became the first African-American to pass the bar in Pennsylvania. On September 23, 1868, he was admitted to the South Carolina bar. He was elected to the South Carolina Senate in 1868 and served until February of 1870 when he was elected Associate Supreme Court Justice of South Carolina. He was reelected to the Supreme Court in 1874 and served until December of 1877. After Justice Wright left the South Carolina Supreme Court, he established a law school at Claflin University and served as a law professor from 1881-85. He suffered for several years from tuberculosis and died at his home in Charleston on February 18, 1885.

Francis L. Cardozo

Francis Cardozo was Secretary of State from 1868 to 1872 and State Treasurer from 1872 to 1877. He was born free in Charleston in 1837, the son of a Jewish father who was an economist and editor of a Charleston newspaper and of a mother who was half Indian and half African. Because he was born free, he was able to attend a school in Charleston. As a young man he was sent to Scotland to continue his education. He was ordained a Presbyterian minister and became the pastor of Temple Street Congregational Church in New Haven, Connecticut. In 1865, after the end of the Civil War, he was sent by the American Missionary Association to Charleston to work among the freedmen. He established a school in Charleston that later became known as Avery Institute. He was a representative to the 1868 constitutional convention. As chairman of the educational committee, he played an important part in laying the foundation of the public school system of the state. In the debate over public education at the constitutional convention, a lengthy discussion was held over the question of whether there should be compulsory education and over whether the integration of schools should be required. Cardozo recommended that the schools be open and available to all children and that the parents should determine which school their children would attend. The schools could be separate, but if a child of one race was desirous of attending a school of the other race that child should have the privilege of doing so. The constitutional convention stated, "All public schools, colleges and universities in this state supported in whole or in part by public funds shall be free and open to all the children and youth of the state, without regard to race or color." After Cardozo was elected State Treasurer in 1872, many state officials were charged with corruption, but Cardozo maintained a record of integrity and helped carry out financial reforms. Under the Redemption government in 1877, he was convicted of conspiracy to defraud, a charge that later historians agreed was politically motivated. He was pardoned by Governor Wade Hampton and moved to Washington, D.C. In 1884, he became principal of black schools in Washington, D.C. until his death.

HON. ROBERT SMALLS OF BEAUFORT



HON. J. J. WRIGHT, ASSOCIATE JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT

HON. FRANCIS L. CARDOZO, STATE TREASURER

HON. BEVERLY NASH OF COLUMBIA, BRIGADIER GENERAL OF MILITA

Henry E. Hayne

Henry E. Hayne, a member of the Senate from 1868 to 1872 and Secretary of State from 1872 to 1876, was born in Charleston in 1840. Unlike many of the African-American legislators who were veterans of the Union Army, Hayne was a Confederate veteran. Hayne was also the first African-American to attend the University of South Carolina (USC). He attended USC Medical School while Secretary of State.

Thomas E. Miller

The last two African-Americans in Congress from South Carolina were Thomas E. Miller and George Washington Murray. Thomas Miller was born in Ferrebee, South Carolina on June 17, 1849. His parents were a free black couple, Richard Miller and Mary Ferrebee. Miller went to school in Charleston and in Hudson, New York. He attended Lincoln University in Chester County, Pennsylvania, graduating in 1872. He studied law with at least two prominent lawyers, and in 1875 he was admitted to the bar and began the practice of law in Beaufort, South Carolina. His first political office was that of County School Commissioner. He was later elected to the S.C. House of Representatives from where he advanced to the state Senate. Miller became the Republican State Party Chairman in 1884. His hard work for the Republican Party helped him capture the Republican nomination for the congressional seat that had been formerly held by Robert Smalls. When the votes were counted, the white Democratic candidate, William Elliott, had won by thirteen hundred votes. Miller appealed the decision to the U.S. House of Representatives because the district was predominately black and Republican, and he felt there had been voting fraud. A vote was taken by the U.S. House of Representatives to unseat Elliott and give the seat to Thomas Miller. Miller won the vote 157 to one. By the time Miller was seated, there was only a week left before Congress recessed, so he had very little time to enjoy his victory and returned to Beaufort to campaign for the next election. In this election Miller won, but Elliott, who again was running against him, challenged the count. Late in the year, the South Carolina Supreme Court declared Elliott the winner. Miller returned to his law practice and was reelected to the South Carolina House of Representatives. He and Robert Smalls represented the Beaufort district in the constitutional convention of 1895. They opposed a provision of the constitution that added a new criterion for voting. The provision required a voter to read and write any section of the state constitution on demand unless he could prove that he had paid taxes on a minimum of $300 worth of property. This could make it difficult for poor people to vote, both black and white. The following year, he helped to establish the State Negro College that is now called South Carolina State University and became the first president of the school. In 1910, he opposed the election of Governor Coleman Blease, and the governor requested that he resign from the presidency of South Carolina State College. He later moved to Philadelphia and died there in 1938.

George Washington Murray

George Washington Murray was the last of South Carolina's black legislators. Because of the election dispute between Miller and Elliott, there was no representative from the Beaufort district for two years. Murray was elected to the seat in 1892. He was born in 1853 near Rembert, South Carolina, in Sumter County to enslaved parents. At the end of the Civil War he was a free but friendless orphan. He somehow acquired enough education to teach school, but he had never been in a schoolroom until he went there as a teacher. At twenty-one years of age, he qualified through a competitive examination and enrolled in University of South Carolina where he studied for two years before the university closed, forcing him to leave. He resumed teaching for the next fourteen years along with farming. In 1888, he was the Sumter county Republican Chairman. Two years later, he became the customs inspector for the port of Charleston. In 1892, he ran for the U.S. Congress and won. In the fall of 1894, the borders of his district had been realigned to reduce the number of black voters and to increase the number of white voters. Murray lost to William Elliott by more than seventeen hundred votes. Murray appealed the result. The election committee found widespread flaunting of the election law. Polls in three of four precincts mainly those with large Republican majorities had not been

HON. HENRY E. HAYNE, SECRETARY OF STATE

HON. SAMUEL J. LEE, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE AND GENERAL OF MILITIA

STEPHEN SWAILS

opened. Blacks were denied registration certificates. On June 4, 1889, the house voted to unseat Elliott and give the district to Murray. In 1896, the Republicans held two nominating conventions. When a white man was nominated, Murray decided to run again. The two Republicans running for the seat divided the party and the Democrat, William Elliott, was again sent back to the House. Murray set up a real estate firm in Sumter. He failed to win election in 1898. He was later charged with fraud and moved to Chicago in 1905, while his case was pending. In April of 1926, South Carolina's last black Reconstruction member of Congress died in Chicago, Illinois.

Stephen A. Swails

A number of the legislators were veterans of the Civil War, having fought in the Union Army with the 54th Massachusetts and with other units that fought in South Carolina. Stephen A. Swails was a first sergeant in Company F of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. The 54th Massachusetts was famous for the battle of Fort Wagner, where they lost many men in an unsuccessful attempt to take the fort.

In the battle of Olustee, Swails received a citation for his "coolness, bravery, and efficiency." He was also the first African-American soldier to become a non-commissioned officer in a Massachusetts regiment. At the end of the Civil War, instead of returning to the North, Swails remained in South Carolina and began working for the Freedman's Bureau as a school teacher. Later, he served as a S.C. Senator from Williamsburg County and as President Pro-Temporary of the Senate from 1872 to 1877. He also served as a delegate to the constitutional convention of 1868. As a state delegate of the Republican Party, he represented South Carolina at the National Republican Convention. He became a trustee of the University of South Carolina and attended law school.

Samuel J. Lee

Samuel J. Lee was the first African-American to become Speaker of the House of Representatives. Lee was born into enslavement in 1844 in Abbeville District on the plantation of Samuel McGowan. He accompanied his owner in the Confederate Army and was wounded in the second battle of Bull Run. He returned to South Carolina after the war and was admitted to the practice of law in 1870. He was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives. While Lee was Speaker of the House, he also became Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the University of South Carolina. As Chairman of the Board of Trustees, he was instrumental in the admission of African-Americans to the University of South Carolina in 1870. The Board of Trustees of the University made many changes to the University. The school was opened to all races, and scholarships were made available to students. A Normal School was established to which women were admitted. Lee was a general in the National Guard in charge of the unit in Charleston. After he left the House of Representatives, he moved to Charleston and practiced law until his death in 1895.

William Beverly Nash

William Beverly Nash fits the description early historians had of black legislators. He was enslaved from birth. He was tall, very dark, and did not appear to have any mixture of white blood. He worked at the Hunt Hotel in Columbia as a waiter and bootblack. He had no formal education. Despite what many people considered shortcomings, Nash became one of the most powerful politicians in Richland County and in the Republican Party. He was a state senator representing Richland County. As senator, he was the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. This committee determined the order of legislation to be voted upon. In the 1868 constitutional convention, Nash spoke to the convention saying "We are not prepared for this suffrage. But we can learn. Give a man tools and let him commence to use them and in time he will learn a trade. So, it is with voting. We may not understand at the start, but in time we shall learn to do our duty." As these new voters gained in experience, they soon learned that many white public officials were no better qualified than they.

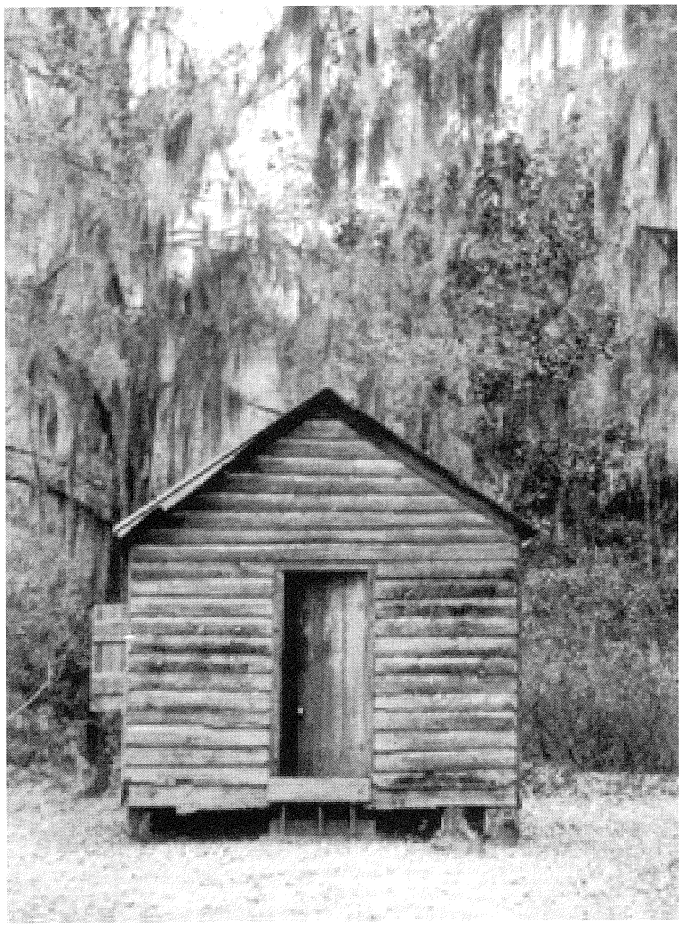
Policies of the Reconstructionist State Government

The new government elected in 1868 tried to keep many of the promises of the new constitution. It faced two major problems. First, the state had little money available for anything. Second, whites who had fought against the Union opposed the new government every step of the way. Nevertheless, many African-American political leaders of this period had great vision. The policies they attempted and the institutions they began are essential for South Carolina today.

Public Education

In 1870, the legislature passed a law that attempted to create a real statewide public school system. It set up school districts with elected trustees for schools. Funding was the major problem. The state provided a little money, but left most of the responsibility to local areas. As a result some areas had pretty good schools while others had poor ones. Yet despite all the problems, by the time Reconstruction ended, South Carolina had a system that included nearly 2,800 schools with just over 3,000 teachers. More than 123,000 students attended, over 50,000 of whom were whites.

African-American leaders were very moderate in their demands. They even allowed separation of the races in schools. Their moderation stands in stark



One-room school house. Many of the schools built to provide public education were only one room schools. They were crude at best and allowed to be segregated by race. Unfortunately, for the greater part of the next 100 years, white authorities did nothing to improve schools for African-American children. This example of a one-room school house for African-American children was photographed near Summerville in 1938. Library of Congress LC-USF34 50522.

contrast to the radical racism of many whites who would drive them from power a few years later.

The principle of public education proved to be a popular idea. In 1876 both parties, the Republicans, who were mainly African-Americans, and the Democrats, who were almost all whites, endorsed the idea of public schools. Both wanted a statewide property tax to support the schools. Although public schools had a very rough and shaky beginning in South Carolina, African-Americans were in charge when the state first created schools on a statewide basis. This was a great contribution.

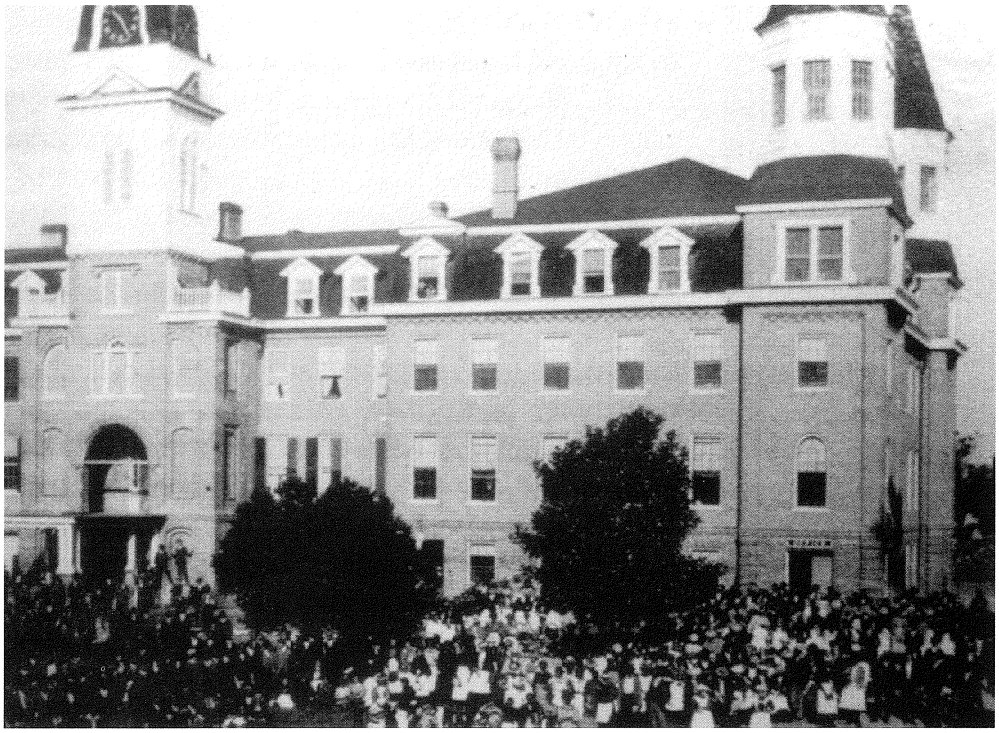
Higher Education

In 1869, the legislature granted a charter that created Claflin College in Orangeburg. It was a private school begun by Methodist Episcopal ministers. The charter stated that no one would be refused admission because of "race, complexion, or religious opinion." The reference to "complexion" was necessary because over the years of enslavement, African-Americans had begun to distinguish among themselves on the basis of darkness of skin color. They had been taught that lighter, or "brighter," was better. A lighter skin meant that more of one's ancestors were white. This was not necessarily so. Genetic chance can create great differences in the skin color of people with identical ancestors. Of course, skin color has nothing to do with intelligence or character. Claflin's charter recognized and confronted this widely held, yet mistaken, idea.

In addition to other courses of study, Claflin provided some legal training. It had one of the most able jurists of the time as the chair of its legal program. Judge Jonathan Jasper Wright had been a justice on the S.C. Supreme Court for seven years. White political leaders forced him off the bench after the 1876 election. In 1881, he joined Claflin, where he remained until his death five years later. We might say that South Carolina's loss was Claflin's gain.

Claflin College played a role in the creation of S.C. State College. In 1872, the state legislature created the S.C. Agricultural College and Mechanics Institute in Orangeburg. Federal money from the land grant college program funded it. Its 116-acre campus and experimental farm was located next to Claflin. For a time its board met jointly with Claflin's. Teachers taught at both schools at the same time. When the state reorganized the higher education system in 1878, both were simply called Claflin College. For many years they shared the same president.

The schools were not separated again until 1895. At the 1895 constitutional convention, the few African-American delegates were able to use whites' own fears to create a separate state-funded school. Claflin was a church-run school. Whites saw Northern Methodists as too radical on racial matters. Playing on this fear, black delegates were able to con-



Claflin College's Main Building in 1899. Reproduced from Constance B. Schulz, Ed., The History of S.C. Slide Collection, *slide I-24 (Sandlapper Publishing Company, 1989). Library of Congress.*

vince the white majority to separate the schools. Separation ended any possible Northern Methodist control. It also gave African-Americans their own state-funded institution. State leaders gave the school the awkward name of the Colored Normal, Industrial, Agricultural, and Mechanical College of South Carolina. Professors had to be "Southern men and women of the Negro race." From these beginnings, S.C. State University evolved.

Churches established two private schools in Columbia during Reconstruction. In 1871, the American Baptist Home Mission Society created Benedict Institute. It is named for its original benefactor, Mrs. Bethesda Benedict, who lived in Rhode Island. Much of the funding for the school, however, came from African-American Baptists all over South Carolina. The driving force in raising these funds was its second president, the Reverend Lewis Colby. Recognizing its growth, the legislature chartered the school in 1894 under its present name, Benedict College.

Next to Benedict is another church created school, Allen University. This school began entirely within the state. It started as Payne Institute in 1871, founded by the AME Church in Abbeville. In 1880, the state church moved it to Columbia as Allen University. By the turn of the century, it consisted of two large brick buildings and thirteen African-American faculty. It had given degrees to over 500 students. Like Claflin College in Orangeburg, Allen also had a law program. Daniel Augustus Straker ran the law classes. Straker had attended law school at Howard University in Washington, D.C. In 1882, he came to Allen, where he earned the reputation as one of the best lawyers in the state, even though he practiced in courts that openly discriminated against his race.

For a few years during Reconstruction, what is now the University of South Carolina in Columbia was integrated. In 1873, an African-American student entered the school. A number of white students and faculty immediately left the school. More African-American students and faculty came to the school. Except for some white Northern professors, all the whites left. When the Southern whites regained control of state government in 1877, they closed the school down. Later they reopened it as an all-white school.

To be sure, traditionally black colleges and universities did not have the resources of the white institutions. Yet they performed wonders with what they did have. Many of the people you will read about who made great contributions to both the state and the nation received their education at one of these schools.

Land Distribution

One of the first actions of the new legislature elected in 1868 was creating the S.C. Land Commission. This new agency was created to keep one of the most

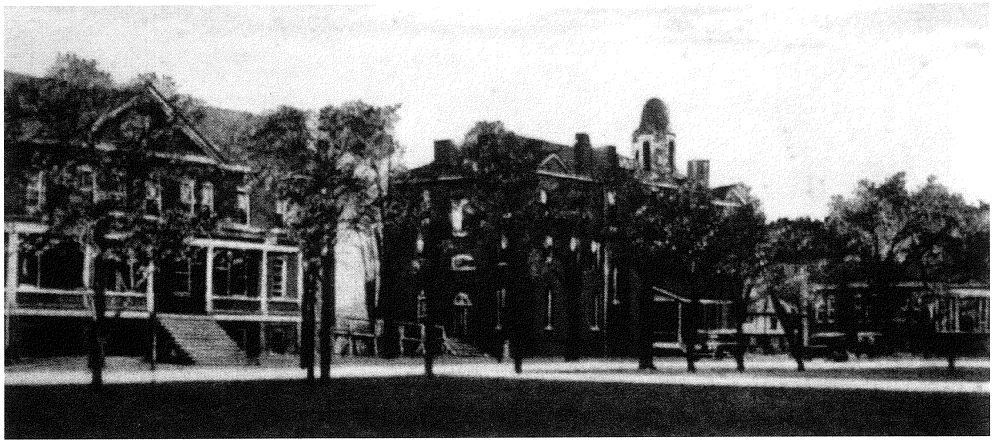
important promises of the 1868 constitution. The commission was to sell bonds and use the money to buy land. Then the Commission was to divide the land into small farms and sell them to freedmen.

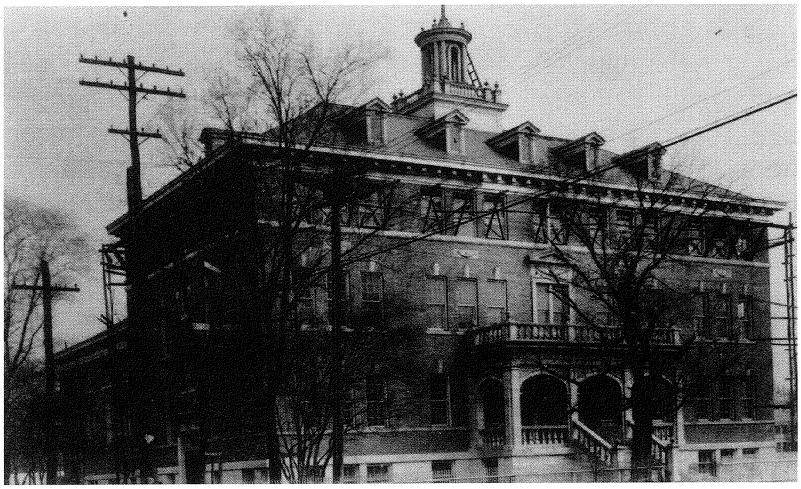
The Commission served its purpose. While in business from 1868 to 1879, it sold small farms to about 14,000 African-Americans. They were poor and began with almost nothing, but they helped lay the economic and social foundation for the civil rights revolution that would come nearly 100 years later.

Whites charged that the commission was hopelessly corrupt. Many history books say little else. That a great deal of money was wasted and lost is true. What white critics ignore is that a significant part of the losses benefited white landowners. Corrupt white and black "carpetbaggers" from the North did not just steal the money. The commission bought most of the land from white plantation owners who were unable to make profits from it anymore. Given the general poverty that existed, they would not have been able to sell their land to anyone in a private sale. In addition, the land was often overpriced. For example, the Land Commission bought land in what is now Abbeville County for $10 an acre when the going price was only $2 an acre. The white family that sold it made five times what it was worth. The African-Americans who bought it also received a benefit as the commission never insisted that the buyers pay the full $10 an acre. Of course, paying the difference was left to the government. Regardless, the state did benefit in the long run. Unproductive land was transferred to people who made it productive. Those who bought it became taxpaying citizens.

Life on the Land—Enduring Against the Odds

What did all of these changes mean for average African-Americans in South Carolina? For some it





(Top) Benedict College. Reproduced from Constance B. Schulz, Ed., The History of S.C. Slide Collection, *slide I-20 (Sandlapper Publishing Company, 1989). Courtesy Howard Woody, from the Howard Woody Postcard Research Collection. (Bottom) Allen University's Chappelle Administration building in a 1922 photo by Richard Roberts. The building was designed by a well-known African-American architect and named after former school president Bishop W.D. Chappelle. Reproduced from Constance B. Schulz, Ed.,* The History of S.C. Slide Collection, *slide I-18 (Sandlapper Publishing Company, 1989). Courtesy of Roberts family.*

(Top) A Fourth of July celebration on St. Helena Island. Those African -Americans who were able to obtain land on St. Helena Island kept it and passed it down from one generation to the next. They built a strong sense of community by helping each other. Here they celebrate Independence Day together as a community. Library of Congress LC-USF33 30417-M1. (Bottom) The first building of the Penn School in an 1890 photograph. From the Penn School Collection. Permission granted by Penn Center, Inc., St. Helena Island, S.C. In the Southern Historical Collection of the Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. This picture can also be seen in The History of S.C. Slide Collection, *(Sandlapper Publishing Company, 1989) as slide 1-3.*

meant little. White landowners gave them contracts that turned them into "peons." A peon is a person tied to the land by debt. They were free in the sense that they were no longer the property of whites. But they still worked land that was not theirs. They still had to endure miserable working conditions. They could not escape. Under law, leaving was an attempt to avoid paying a debt. If caught, authorities could place them in prison.

Sometimes landowners could lease such prisoners to work as convict labor. For many there was no escape other than death. This, of course, was true of many poor whites as well as blacks. This situation continued for nearly 100 years until World War II.

History books often ignore what these changes meant for those who were able to buy land. While some of these people did fail and lose their land, many others did not. Thousands of families endured, survived, and even thrived in some instances. What they did against terrible odds is an often untold story, but at the same time an important story. Let us look at a few of the hundreds of places where the ignored story can be found.

The Penn Center and St. Helena Island

African-Americans first began obtaining land in the Beaufort area during the Civil War. When Northern troops captured the area in 1865, the Army took the

Promised Land was established in 1870 with land bought from white landowners and sold to African-Americans. The community remains today. Photo by Aimee Smith.

land. General William T. Sherman led the Northern troops. The plantation owners, numbering just over 1,000, had fled. After a couple of years of confusion, the government decided to seize the land and sell it to cover unpaid taxes. The government sold it to Northerners and to some of the more than 32,000 African-Americans who had been enslaved there.

Missionaries and teachers soon began arriving to help the new owners. This became known as the Port Royal experiment. It was an experiment in the sense that white Northerners wanted to see if African-Americans were capable of supporting themselves in freedom. In a sense, Port Royal was a rehearsal for the Reconstruction policies the North followed after the war.

Following the war, some of the former plantation owners were able to get their land back. African-Americans held on to some of it. The S.C. Land Commission sold some other land in the area to freedmen. Freedmen bought additional land in private sales. By 1890 African-Americans owned three out of every four acres on St. Helena Island.

One of the schools created by Northern Quaker missionaries that lasted the longest was the Penn School on St. Helena Island. In 1862, Ellen Murray and Laura Towne came to begin the school. Ms. Towne so fell in love with the area that she stayed the rest of her life. The school gave a basic education to the people of the island. It also served as a center of community life. It helped create a sense of community and cooperation. Although farms were small, the people worked hard and survived. Residents built new homes, added second floors, and replaced wooden shutters with glass windows. They even had venetian blinds, small musical organs, and sewing machines. Northern visitors gave much of the credit to the Penn School, but a great deal of credit should also go to those who lived there.

Later on, the Penn School became the Penn Center. It continued to help the people of the Sea Islands. The Penn Center also serves as a conference center. Dr. Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders met there to plan strategy in the 1960s.

In the 1950s new problems began to arise for the people of the Sea Islands. First, pollution damaged the oyster beds that provided a living for the residents. Many people left the area. Then in the 1980s, developers began to build golf courses and luxury resorts. Property taxes rose. Many people could not pay and lost their homes. The Penn Center has responded to these problems by setting up the Penn School for Preservation on St. Helena Island. This new school will teach leadership skills to area residents. People will also learn how to work with government to protect the environment. Finally, the school will train Sea Islanders for better jobs in the resort industry.

Promised Land

Promised Land lies in what is now Greenwood County, just over the line from Abbeville County. This small farming community came into being in 1870 when the S.C. Land Commission offered for sale 700 acres in small farms ranging from fifty to one hundred acres. By the end of 1872, just under fifty families had bought farms there. They called it Promised Land because they had bought it for only $10 down with the promise to repay the rest.

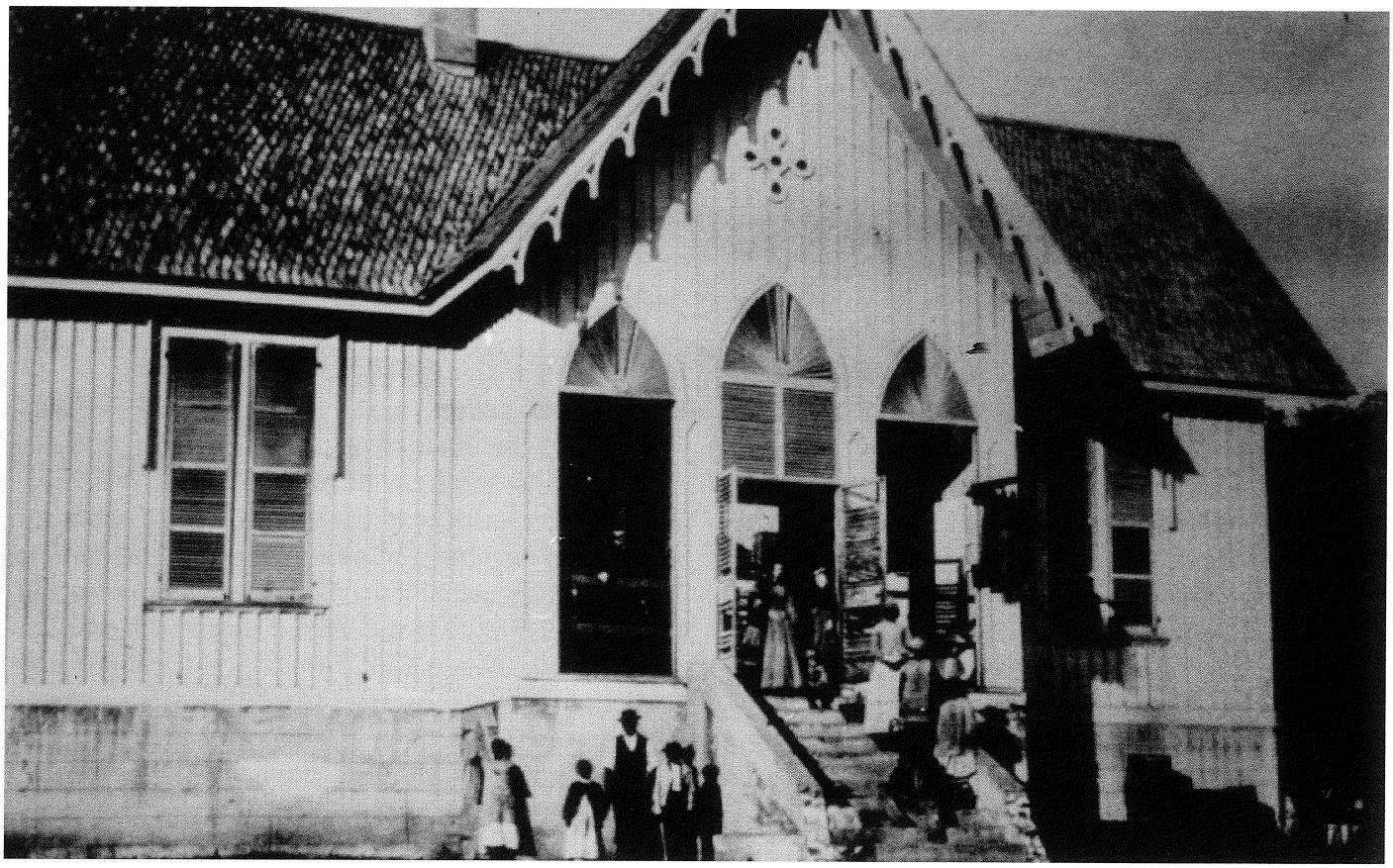
Promised Land was different from St. Helena Island in several ways. First, the African-Americans

in Promised Land had virtually no help from outsiders. Once they obtained their land, they were on their own. The close-knit community they created and maintained was evidence of their own skill and ingenuity. Second, it was in the central part of the state where there were relatively fewer people of their race. Safety and security was a greater problem for them. Finally, Promised Land was much less well-known and much less studied by outsiders. This is partially because of how they solved their security problem. They lived quiet lives that minimized contact with white society. As a result they were less likely to suffer any attack. Isolation was their best defense.

Allen Goode was one of the first settlers in Promised Land. He was active in the Republican Party in the 1868 election, the first one in which African-Americans were allowed to vote. Whites were already trying to use force to prevent blacks from exercising their rights. Goode was a target of this violence. On the day of the election, Goode was working as a precinct manager. When he tried to stop some white men from threatening voters, they shot him. Though he survived, no one was ever arrested for the crime. Two years later he brought two oxen, four cows, six hogs, and a horse to Promised Land. He was one of the wealthier new residents. Like Goode, most of the other residents had lived in the area all of their lives. They chose to stay in order to be close to family and friends.

The very first year Promised Land was settled, the residents built a school. All the trustees of the school lived in the community. Every child who was not absolutely needed for work in the fields went to school. About ninety children crowded into the school's only room. Thus began a tradition that still

A store around 1865 that supplied freedmen with a few of the essentials they needed to survive in a rural economy. Reproduced from Constance B. Schulz, Ed., The History of S.C. Slide Collection, *slide B-114 (Sandlapper Publishing Company, 1989). Courtesy of Beaufort County Library.*



exists. A sociology professor at Lander College noticed in the 1970s that students from Promised Land seemed to work harder than other students in her classes. The children of Promised Land were expected and still are expected to get a good education.

The farmers of Promised Land were wise in planning their crops. Rather than borrow money to buy fertilizer for cash crops like cotton, they grew only a little cotton. Instead, they grew most of what they needed to survive. They grew vegetables like beans, peas, sweet potatoes, and corn. They used some of the corn to feed the livestock. This way they did not have to buy very much from the store. They avoided debt. This also helped keep them isolated from whites.

The genius of this kind of farming was that it kept them from getting trapped in the "crop lien" system that destroyed so many other farmers, both black and white. Once in debt, farmers were forced to grow more cash crops to pay that debt. Unfortunately, the worn-out soil rarely produced enough cotton to offset the cost of fertilizer and food for the family. The more cotton farmers grew, the more fertilizer they needed, because cotton was particularly hard on the soil. People caught in that trap often lost their land. The farmers of Promised Land and their peers in other places were smart enough to avoid that trap. They did not get rich, but they endured. They kept their land for their children. They made it possible for the next generation to be a little better off.

Rebuilding Families

One of the most cruel aspects of enslavement was what it did to families. Being "sold down the river," separated mothers from children and fathers from

A photo taken about 1866 of elderly African-Americans who had just escaped enslavement. Many of them, no doubt, never learned what happened to their families. Reproduced from Constance B. Schulz, Ed., The History of S.C. Slide Collection, *slide G-73 (Sandlapper Publishing Company, 1989). From the Penn School Collection, permission granted by Penn Center, Inc., St. Helena Island, S.C.*

mothers. It tore people away from those who loved them. Following emancipation and for years after, African-Americans tried to locate family members. While some did find their lost relatives, many never did. A whole generation of people searched until the end of their lives. All we have left today of those desperate efforts are old newspaper advertisements. In African-American newspapers until the early 1900s, one can find ads placed by those who were "sold away" when young. They wanted to locate a long-lost father, sister, mother, or brother. They typically ended the ads saying that any information would be kindly received. Indeed it would.

Some husbands and wives who were forcibly separated found each other again after the Civil War. Even this good fortune was bittersweet, because they often were not free to return to each other. Thinking they would never see their first spouse again, they had remarried. What remains of those thousands of stories of heartache are letters. The words in those letters speak of undying love. Obligations to new families forced that love to remain distant. Is it possible for us to remember such great sadness after all those years?

Many freed from the chains of enslavement were now free to have a real marriage. Mass weddings took place. Hundreds of couples said their marriage vows all together at the same time with a real minister. Others registered with justices of the peace so that their marriages would be legal. African-Americans wanted nothing more than to become a part of society. They were eager to follow the rules of this new free society.

The 1876 Election

Most histories mark the 1876 election as the end of Reconstruction. The Democrats won after rallying around Wade Hampton as their candidate for governor. The Democrats did indeed win, but they may have won without having the most votes. The "win" was mainly the result of fraud, violence, physical threats, disorganization among the Republicans, and the Union pulling out troops who offered some protection to African-American Republicans.

Each election from 1868 till 1876 was marked by a great deal of violence. Even before the first election took place in which African-Americans could vote, whites used violence. Benjamin F. Randolph was a college-educated African-American minister who fought in the Union Army. After the war, he came to South Carolina. The Republican Party elected him as their chair and as a presidential elector for the 1868 election. He supported integration in the new public school system. He understood the future, saying that "we are laying the foundation for a new structure here. We must decide whether we shall live together or not." The answer of radical whites was "not!" They ambushed him and shot him to death while he was campaigning in Abbeville County.

Monument to B.F. Randolph, who was murdered for exercising his constitutional rights. He was but one of thousands who gave their lives for the political rights we all have today. The caption reads "In memoriam B. F. Randolph late state senator for Orangeburg County and Chairman Republican State Central Committee who died at Hodges Station, Abbeville County at the hands of assassins on Friday, October 16, 1868. Photo by Aimee Smith.

This was far from the only such incident. White radical Democrats formed groups called "rifle clubs." The purpose of the so-called "clubs" was officially supposed to be social. Their leaders openly admitted that they were actually political. They existed to intimidate and, if necessary, to kill Republican voters and supporters. This was called the "Edgefield Policy" because it was planned by ex-Confederate General M. W. Gary of Edgefield County. The Ku Klux Klan was a secret group that also used violence. Political activity was a most risky business for Republicans or African-Americans. Despite these efforts, African-Americans organized and voted. With the support of the state government, they formed militias to protect themselves. The Union Army troops that were still in the state gave them a little additional protection.

In the years before the 1876 election, the Republican Party began to fall apart. The problem centered around Governor Chamberlain, a white Republican who had come South after the war in hopes of becoming a planter but entered politics instead. He lost the trust of many African-Americans because of his efforts to appease white Democrats.

The 1876 election was marked by even more violence than previous elections. One of the worst incidents took place near Aiken in the little town of Hamburg a few months before the election. It is called the Hamburg Massacre. Two whites had a disagreement with an African-American militia unit that was drilling in the road. The disagreement concerned the simple matter of allowing the whites to pass by. The militia allowed the white men to pass.

Afterwards, the white men complained to a local judge and alarmed other whites. About 200 whites from a number of rifle clubs showed up armed with rifles and a cannon. The whites demanded that the African-American militia turn over their weapons. The militia refused and stayed in their barracks. The whites attacked. One attacker was killed. Then the whites opened fire with the cannon and drove the militia out. The attackers captured a number of the militia members. They chose five of their prisoners, lined them up, and shot them.

After this battle, African-American leaders pleaded with President Grant to send additional federal troops to stop this kind of violence. Grant sent troops three weeks before the election. Then President Grant ordered that the "rifle clubs" disband. They did, but after a short time they reformed with new names like the Mounted Baseball Club or the Mother's Little Helpers.

The 1876 election was one of the most corrupt elections in American history. Some of the worst fraud took place in South Carolina. Both sides were guilty of breaking the rules. Available evidence suggests that the white Democrats probably were better at it. Edgefield and Laurens Counties both counted more votes for the Democrats than the number of whites who lived there.

At the beginning of 1877, both Democrat Wade Hampton and Republican Governor Chamberlain claimed victory. The difference was that Hampton had more firepower behind him, and the Republicans were not as well-organized. This was mainly Chamberlain's fault. In an effort to appease whites, he had disarmed many African-American militia units and had turned over weapons to white rifle clubs. By the time the election took place, the official militia was outgunned. The only thing that saved the Republicans was the presence of the U.S. Army.

After the election, two sets of legislators also claimed victory. They formed two separate General Assemblies. When both managed to gain entry into the capitol building, they met at the same time. Neither was willing to leave. They feared that leaving would turn control over to the other. Both governors issued orders. Court fights took place over which orders were legal. This went on for several months.

Then a political deal at the national level destroyed the only chance the Republicans had. The presidential election had also been in dispute. Several states, including South Carolina, had two sets of results. The Southern Democrats made a deal with Northern Republicans. They would allow Republican Rutherford B. Hayes to become president and Hayes would withdraw federal troops. This was done on April 10, 1877. Chamberlain resigned, and the Democrats took over the legislature. Reconstruction was over.

Losing Political Rights

With control of the state government and no military force to oppose them, white Democrats could do as they pleased. They used threats and fraud to easily win the 1878 and 1880 elections. Then they began to find legal ways to take away constitutional rights. In 1882 they used the Eight Box Law. This created a separate ballot box for each office. Voters who could not read the labels, or who were misdirected, and put their votes in the wrong box would not have their votes count. Whites passed restrictive registration laws that allowed local registrars to cross names off the records.

This was done despite Wade Hampton's promises that he would protect the political rights of African-Americans. He could not control the radical whites who took over state government. Ben Tillman was their leader. Tillman and his followers were not satisfied to just reduce the number of African-American votes. They wanted to completely eliminate all African-American votes.

The Convention of 1895—Six Lonely Voices

At the 1895 constitutional convention, Tillman and his followers did eliminate almost all African-American votes. They created barriers that would take half a century to break down. The idea was to create several ways to exclude voters who were likely to be African-Americans. If one way did not work, perhaps another would.

How did these barriers work? If you wanted to vote, you had to be a resident of the state for two years and of the county for one year. You also had to pay poll taxes six months in advance. This eliminated many migrant workers and sharecroppers who moved around a lot. You had to pass a literacy test. Local officials ran the test so they could choose who passed and who did not. Because poor whites feared that this might eliminate their votes, the convention added provisions that could be used to protect them. You could bypass the literacy test in one of two ways. First, you were exempt if you had property worth at least $300. Second, you would be exempt if you could satisfy local officials that you understood the Constitution when a local official read it to you. If you were African-American, you would most certainly have a hard time satisfying a white local official that you understood what he was reading. You might obtain a copy of the South Carolina Constitution and try this. In addition, the local election official could eliminate you if you did not supply proof that you had paid all your taxes for the past year. For good measure, you could lose your right to vote for conviction of any of a long list of minor crimes.

Present at the convention were six rather lonely African-Americans. Five of them were from the Beaufort area: Robert Smalls, Thomas Miller, William Whipper, James Wigg, and Isaiah Reed. The sixth, Robert Anderson, was from Georgetown. They all spoke bravely against what the convention was doing. They pointed with pride to what African-Americans had accomplished. They challenged the notion of white supremacy. They even challenged the whites to pass a fair literacy test, arguing that doing so would give whites only a slim majority. Although they were outnumbered and lost, they did convince a few whites to vote against the restrictions.

Most delegates agreed with a white from Berkeley County. According to the official journal of the convention, he bluntly said that "we don't propose to have any fair elections. . .the black man is learning to read faster than the white. . .make it fair and you'll see what'll happen." It was not to be fair for a long time.

Reconsidering History

Generations of white and black South Carolina school children have read history books that told them how terrible Reconstruction was. Reconstruction was said to be the cause of the slow recovery of the state from the Civil War. The books blamed Yankee carpetbaggers and African-Americans who were described as too ignorant for the political power they had. This version of history increased white prejudice. It also encouraged African-Americans to think poorly of themselves.

The truth is quite different. To be sure, there was corruption. Much of it can be blamed on white Republicans who came South to exploit the situation. However, a number of modern historians, white and

black, have shown that many African-American political leaders during Reconstruction acted with wisdom, vision, and great restraint. One can compare the actions of white immigrants who had gained power in cities of the North with freed blacks in the South during Reconstruction. The African-Americans acted at least as responsibly as white Northern immigrants. In fact, one historian argues that if there is fault, it is that African-Americans gave in too easily. They should have fought back harder.

Yet, despite the failure of African-Americans to keep political power, they left us important political institutions. Things like public schools, property rights, and the right to elect leaders help all of us.